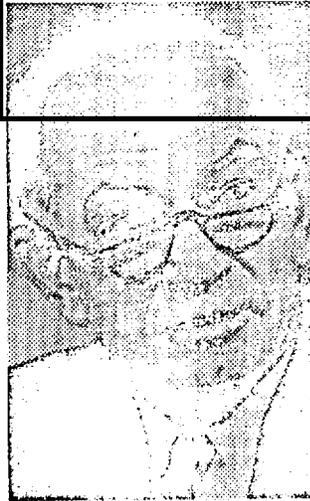


# Fulbright: A Complex Man

Approved For Release 1999/09/17 : CIA-RDP75-00149R0002008

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**SENATOR FULBRIGHT.**  
Portrait of a Public Philosopher. By Tristram Coffin. E. P. Dutton & Co. 378 pages. \$6.95.



SENATOR FULBRIGHT

One of the momentous events of an eventful year, perhaps not as fully recognized as it should have been, has been the debate on the nation's Viet Nam policies. Spread over many months, taking place in many forums, the dialogue has been marked by controversy and in the center of it has been Sen. J. William Fulbright, D-Ark., the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

As the debate has been so little understood and so often misinterpreted, so has Fulbright's role in it, if not in provoking the discussion at least in giving it intelligent direction and high standing. Both the issues involved and the man whom President Truman once described as "an overeducated Oxford S.O.B.," now have been placed, most fortunately, in perspective.

This has been accomplished in a remarkably satisfying biography by Tristram Coffin,

the well-known Washington writer who has a gift for interpreting and making sense out of contemporary affairs.

More than this, however, this "Portrait of a Public Philosopher" is the first full-length biography of the junior Arkansas senator, and a most engaging one. What emerges from these pages is a portrait

of a man whose public career reflects rare insight and even rarer courage.

For those who have been surprised by the vehemence of Fulbright's challenge to the administration's course in Viet Nam, the author makes it clear there is a consistency in the senator's actions. It goes back to the senator's earliest days in Congress and it covers the Lebanon crisis of the Eisenhower administration, the disastrous Bay of Pigs affair, and the Johnson administration's Dominican Republic adventure.

Fulbright, as those acquainted with him know, is a complex individual. More often than he has wished, he has found himself involved in controversy, as in the Viet Nam debate. For him the reasons are simple and compelling, as he revealed in a talk with the author. "I am very concerned about my country," he said. "I have never felt this way before. I wake up at night and I think: We are capable of so much progress, so much good, and we toss away men, money, resources, goodwill like pennies into a savage war—for what? This could have been the golden age of America."

Coffin traces in some detail the development of Fulbright's break with President Johnson, his good friend, over Vietnamese policies. Perhaps he has given to that break more of a finality than it merits, politics and political figures being what they are. (Fulbright, it may be noted, was on hand to welcome the President home from his Asian trip.) But that there has been a cleavage deep and perhaps momentous cannot be questioned.

This is more a biography than a critical examination of the Viet Nam issue. So if what Coffin has written appears one-sided in Fulbright's favor, that becomes understandable.

It is the story of a thinking man who grew up in comfortable circumstances in Northeast Arkansas, starred in football and tennis at the University of Arkansas, was a Rhodes scholar, law teacher and president of the university there before he became a legislator. It is the story of a man responsible for the Fulbright scholarships, of one, according to the author, who was so upset when the late John F. Kennedy sought to reach him for what Fulbright thought was a request to become Secretary of State reach into Arkansas' piney woods. —CECIL HOLLAND.

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